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An Interview In Mexican Jail With a Terrorist

This nation's most wanted terrorist, William (No Hands) Morales, is directing a guerrilla war against the United States from a Mexican prison cell. Intelligence sources believe his main target will be the Summer Olympic Games in Los Angeles.

My associate Jon Lee Anderson recently spent a day with Morales in the "maximum security, highly dangerous wing" of the Mexican prison Reclusorio Norte.

Morales is a deceptively relaxed, soft-spoken man—congenial in repose, intense when animated—who routinely can give orders for shootings and bombings.

He learned his combat tactics on the streets of east Harlem, where he grew up; he picked up his politics from the radical movements of the 1960s.

Now 34, he has developed a smoldering hostility toward the society that spawned him, an animus so deep that he is willing to sacrifice his life in a futile struggle against the U.S. power structure.

Morales is startling to look at. His chin and mouth were disfigured by a

bomb that blew up in his face six years ago. The same accident left him with two stumps for arms, each with a single, grotesque finger where a hand should be.

The terrorist leader talked incessantly about "imperialist domination" by the western world. Yet his language was more street talk than Marxist dialectic. He left no doubt that he was more interested in action than theory.

Police reports confirm that Morales has managed to find plenty of action. As a leader of the Puerto Rican radical group known as FALN, he has been involved in shootouts and bombings. He made a daring escape in 1979 from a fourth-floor window of a New York prison hospital. The FBI has warned any agents who may encounter him: "Morales should be considered armed, dangerous and an escape risk."

In an earlier report, I cited intelligence warnings that the FALN has set up mobile camps just across the Mexican border to train terrorists for attacks on the Los Angeles Olympics and that Morales may be delivered into the custody of leftist authorities in the Tijuana area. This would put him as close to Los Angeles as he could get and still be in Mexico.

Morales has been locked up for killing a Mexican policeman in a gun battle; other charges could keep him

behind bars the rest of his life. Yet he seemed confident that he would get out. He hinted to my reporter Jon Lee Anderson that a political deal might be in the works.

Anderson is the first reporter cleared by the FALN to meet Morales.

The screening process was elaborate, beginning with a contact on the U.S.-Mexican border. Anderson had to make two trips to Mexico City, where he was put in touch with a Trotskyite politician.

Next he was cleared by a left-wing activist who once ran for president of Mexico. Finally, Anderson was taken to the prison by a woman who is one of Morales' lawyers.

FALN literature portrays Morales as a "political prisoner." He said all FALN members take an oath that, if imprisoned, they will declare themselves political prisoners. This means they can't request parole, which would imply that their crimes were nonpolitical.

Morales talked about his escape from U.S. custody and his subsequent capture in Mexico. He was approached, he said, by the U.S. Embassy. "Can you believe," he demanded, "they asked to see me when I first got here and offered to help me?" He was incredulous.

Footnote: Morales made it clear that his agreement to see my reporter did not mean he liked my column.